



The VINE

VSDB-Staunton

March, 2005



Petition Information

Last Friday, a letter written by Casey Morehouse and her husband, Steve, was sent home to the parents of our students. A petition accompanied this letter, asking for support in keeping VSDB in Staunton. Petitions will be placed in the following areas on campus if staff would like to show their support by signing them: Student Life Office; Strader Hall Principal's Office; Peery Hall Principal's Office; Maintenance Department; Housekeeping Department; Dietary Department, and the Infirmary. They need to be returned to Thresa Lindsay in the Superintendent's Office by Monday, March 21. If you would like a copy of the petition to distribute to others you know in the community, let Thresa know. A petition is also being circulated in the dorms for the students to sign.

Below is the letter written by Casey and Steve, and sent to parents:

HELP US KEEP VSDB IN STAUNTON!

Dear Fellow Parents and Friends of Students of VSDB-Staunton.

We are the parents of two deaf sons who have attended VSDB in Staunton since preschool. Our oldest son, Carroll is a senior this year and our younger son, Robert, is currently attending public school in Staunton, but plans to return to VSDB for high school. As you know for many years there has been discussion to consolidate the two VSDB's, Staunton and Hampton into one school. This year at the 2005 General Assembly, budget amendments have been passed to finalize this consolidation.

In summary: Virginia Schools for the Deaf and Blind. Item 136 #1c Consolidation of the two schools upon completion of a new facility at a site to be determined by the State Board of Education. They must consider Public-Private Education Act (PPEA) and other options to obtain proposals for the Board to adopt by the end of July. There is a related amendment, Item C-143 #1c that provides funds for water and sewage systems if Woodrow Wilson Rehab Center is selected as the site for consolidation.

We are at a critical point in the future of our children's school. It is obvious that the two VSDB's will be consolidated into one school. We need to make sure that location will be at the current Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind in Staunton. There is a move to build an entirely new school 10 miles down the road at the site of Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center (WWRC). We **MUST** stop that possibility and insist that any new facilities to serve our children take place at the existing VSDB-Staunton campus.

Why is Staunton the best location?

1. VSDB has been located in the City of Staunton for 166 years. The citizens of Staunton embrace our children as part of their community. Staunton is the center of Deaf and Blind culture in Virginia and this rich heritage should remain in place so our children can benefit from it.

2. Children at the school have easy access to downtown where both deaf and blind children make social and educational contacts in the area. No bus is needed for them to go downtown and it is ideal for mobility training for blind children.

3. Woodrow Wilson Rehabilitation Center is an ADULT REHABILITATION CENTER and our children should not be educated side by side and in conjunction with ADULTS. WWRC is located in an INSTITUTIONAL PARK, Besides WWRC, this complex will include four Augusta County schools and is located on a very busy highway with no access to the amenities of a community. This institutional park has heavy traffic that could endanger the lives of our children and does not give our children ways to develop independence, since there is no community in the area that they can access on their own.

4. The current VSDB-S, in the past decade has modified the buildings and campus to be handicapped accessible. Our older son, who uses a wheelchair, is the recipient of these renovations. We know from experience that more can be done to make VSDB accessible for all.

5. The current VSDB-S already provides a first class high-tech education under the Virginia Standards of Quality and has cooperative agreements for vocational training programs with local school divisions.

6. The school was the FIRST in the state to use high tech capability for telephone communication and classroom education. Each classroom has an up to date computer system. The school has recently added Video Phone capability that is the very latest in communication for the Deaf. The schools existing technology in the area of Visual Impairments is state of the art.

7. And finally, initial research by the Historic Staunton Foundation estimates that renovating the current VSDB-Staunton Campus to meet the needs of current and future students would cost approximately \$21 million dollars, while building a new campus 10 miles down the road would cost \$61 million dollars. As parents and taxpayers does this make any sense? NO!

WHAT CAN WE DO?

1. Immediately write and call Governor Mark Warner and ask him to amend **Budget Item # 136 #1c** to state that **the consolidation of the VSDB's will take place on the existing campus of VSDB in Staunton**. In your letter please specifically mention your child, their disability (deaf or blind) and give personal examples as to why keeping VSDB in Staunton is important to your child and family. Do not hesitate to send the Governor pictures of your child at various events at VSDB. He needs to know that this decision will have profound effects on real people, our children. The Governor has 30 days to respond to the General Assembly's budget, so it is critical to write to him as soon as possible

2. Follow this letter up with a similar letter to the Virginia Board of Education, addressed to Dr. Belle Wheelan, Secretary of Education and sent to all Board members. Mention **Budget Item # 136 #1c** and state that **the consolidation of the VSDB's should take place on the existing campus of VSDB in Staunton**. Again, mention your child, their disability and give personal examples as to why keeping VSDB in Staunton is important. Send pictures.

3. You can also call and write your local Senator and Delegate to ask them to support the consolidation of the VSDB's at an upgraded facility on the VSDB-Staunton Campus. Mention the same above **Budget Item #136 #1c**. This would be very helpful as our legislators have direct access to the Governor.

4. We have attached a petition to this letter. Please take this petition and over the next week, share it with family members, friends, your churches and civic organizations. Gather as many signatures as possible and then return it to VSDB in your child's weekly envelope, or mail it to Casey Morehouse, VSDB, P.O. Box 2069, Staunton, VA 24402. They will be forwarded to us and we will then send the collected petitions to the Governor and the Board of Education. Please send signed petitions back by Monday 3/14/05.

As the primary consumers of the services of the VSDB's, we have the power to ensure that a consolidated VSDB will take place at the Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind in Staunton, where it has existed for 166 years. This is a very important time in our children's future. Thank you for your help.

Sincerely,

Steven K. Bradley

Katherine C. Morehouse

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Can It Be? More Pink?

Seems everyone joined in the fun on the last "Pink Day" event.
Folks gathered in Main Hall to "strut their pink stuff"!!

